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Laos: Communist forces have overrun the key defensive position guarding the approaches to Long Tieng.

In the early morning of 16 March elements of a two-battalion North Vietnamese force launched a heavy attack against the government outpost of Tha Tam Bleung, scattering the 250-man garrison. Situated in a valley some eight miles northeast of Long Tieng, Tha Tam Bleung has long been considered a key to the defense of General Vang Pao's headquarters and the large Meo population nearby.

The loss of this position will undoubtedly contribute to an increase in the movement, under way the last two weeks, of the civilian population from the area. This exodus has led to the abandonment of nearly all the villages northeast of Long Tieng, making the enemy's task of moving undetected in strength on Long Tieng considerably easier.

It is likely, however, that before the Communists move on Long Tieng they will concentrate on mopping up government elements in nearby outposts. A large North Vietnamese force closing in on Ban Na and enemy attacks near Khang Kho have resulted in the loss of several positions in this area in recent days.

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Communist China: The almost complete reversal in the propaganda line from Shanghai in recent months reflects the strength of moderate elements in regime policy-making.

During the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai was a major radical stronghold and its radios and newspapers clearly echoed the views of the Cultural Revolution group in Peking. Over the past few months, Shanghai propaganda has continued to promote a radical line on matters such as education reform but has abandoned its advocacy of ultraleftist positions on more pressing political issues.

Recent radiobroadcasts from the city, for example, have been among the most vociferous in China in denouncing the claims of former Cultural Revolution activists to membership in the new party. Such a stand contrasts sharply with the situation last summer and early fall when Shanghai praised those party committees it felt were leading the way in introducing former Red Guard factionalists into their ranks.

Two recently received articles by Shanghai's leading ex - Red Guard organization further illustrate the city authorities' changed political message. One article berated former Red Guards for resisting Peking's injunctions to rehabilitate erstwhile party cadres whose expertise is sorely needed in the work of reconstruction. The second article dealt with the anticorruption campaign and admitted that it was being directed, in part at least, against ex - Red Guards who had been promoted to leadership posts and were abusing their positions.

In its efforts to achieve political stabilization and to get on with the difficult task of rebuilding the party, the regime has been giving increasingly short shrift to the claims of Cultural Revolution activists for a place in the establishment. Shanghai's adoption of a softer line on the issues involved strongly suggests that moderate elements are exerting considerable pressure on their radically-inclined colleagues.

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Colombia: A two-day nationwide student strike to protest the closing of the National University in Bogota is scheduled to begin today.

The government closed the university in late February following a strike in the medical school. Since then, students in many universities have had strikes and demonstrations to protest the closing.

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Adding to the gravity of the situation is the fact that the campaigns for the presidential election on 19 April are in full swing. Moreover, the official National Front candidate, Misael Pastrana, is doing poorly and is in danger of losing.

President Lleras may reopen the university soon. If he is able to satisfy some student demands, he may keep them from participating in a national "patriotic" labor strike now being planned for early April. By successfully handling the situation, President Lleras may enhance Pastrana's chances for the presidency.

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Upper Volta: The army's move to continue its control when the country returns to "civilian rule" later this year could lead to considerable turmoil.

A draft constitution presented by General Lamizana's military government to a recently appointed constitutional commission would legitimize the past four years of army rule and ensure complete military control during a five-year "transitional period." If the draft is accepted without change, Upper Volta will have a military president, and the army will be heavily represented in the cabinet, the legislature, and the supreme court..

Virtually every organized civilian group in the country appears to be opposed to the proposed constitution. Civilian political leaders have promised to reject the draft, and key labor unions have threatened a general strike if major changes are not made.

President Lamizana probably misjudged the extent of opposition to such a blatant continuation of army control, and he now may have to make some modifications in the draft constitution. Lamizana has spent four years repairing the country's serious financial difficulties, however, and he is not likely under any circumstances to allow the spendthrift civilian politicians to regain full control. The manner in which the proposed constitution has been presented may ensure that the military's retention of power will not be achieved without some civil disorder and consequent repression by the army.

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Turkey: The narrow vote of confidence won by Prime Minister Demirel on Sunday adds little strength or prestige to his government. The protracted political crisis and the unsubstantiated charges of corruption against members of Demirel's family have damaged him

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If political instability persists, the pressure for direct military involvement will increase.

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Malawi: In a broadcast to the nation on 15 March, President Banda announced that police have arrested several persons allegedly responsible for the wave of ritual ax killings in Blantyre. Almost 40 people have been killed since the terrorism began last August, and the government has been on the defensive because of its inability to solve the crimes. The arrests should help allay the fears of the population for now. Banda has, however, made previous claims of having arrested those responsible; if the killings continue, public confidence in his regime may further decline.

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Dahomey: The chances of military intervention in the continuing presidential election are increasing because of the confusion that has characterized voting and tabulation in the first two of the six districts. More than half the voters in these two most populous districts abstained, innumerable instances of fraud were reported, and police reinforcements were needed to restore order in Cotonou during the balloting on 13 March. Former president Apithy leads in the four-way contest, but voting now moves into the strongholds of other candidates.

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